

Reader Views

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Treehouse Chronicles: One Man's Dream of Life Aloft

S. Peter Lewis, author & photographer; T.B.R. Walsh, illustrator

TMC Books, LLC (2005)

Reviewed by Tammy Petty Conrad for Reader Views (2/06)

Not just for carpenters or those good with their hands, this book is for everyone who dreams or has had a fantastical project in mind. Peter Lewis's enthusiasm and determination is contagious as you read through the beautifully illustrated pages telling his story of a three year process involving every family member and most of his friends along the way. A true dreamer, he didn't just build a kid's tree fort, but an elaborate two story timberframe structure fully finished inside with sanded floors and painted walls. It eventually included a spiral staircase and a pivoting drawbridge, although 39 feet about the ground.

"This is the story of what happens when big people decide to be kids again and they have tools and lumber." Reading this statement, you may think of Tim the "Tool Man" Taylor, but actually Peter is an outdoorsman and visionary, more than he is a builder. His nature essays sprinkled throughout keep the project grounded in a forested area of Maine where his family has relocated. Luckily he had Ted, not only his illustrator, but his faithful sidekick who actually knew what he was doing, like Al Borland, of *Home Improvement*. Not a quick project slapped up in a weekend, this required as much time spent in thought and planning as in actual hammering and drilling. Peter emphasizes this is a "why to", not a "how to" book.

He mentions his wife's never-ending support, but I can't help but wonder what Karen said exactly when he told her about the idea. Or what she thought as she watched from the window over the years as tools fell to the ground and her husband occasionally slipped to be finally caught by his harness, dangling in compromising positions, inches from being mauled by a power tool.

When the building was finished on Day 1028, I felt his sadness, but also experienced his joyfulness at finally using the space for what it was designed for. "The treehouse is my thoughtful spot. Like Winnie the Pooh, I too need to work the fluff out from time to time."

While at first glance it may look like a beautiful coffee table book to be displayed proudly, it can truly be enjoyed cover to cover. Plenty of photographs document the process, but the watercolors and pencil sketches add magic. I am eager to share this book with the dreamers in my family. While I can't imagine any of them completing such a project, I can visualize them tearing through the pages, smiling and occasionally chuckling at the tight spots Peter finds himself in. And being happy, as I was, that he completed his "...place to hear the whisper of dreams." We should all be so lucky.